

FLIPPING THE ART SCHOOL - PROPOSITIONS FOR AN EXPANDED STUDIO A MINDFUL CONTRIBUTION TO THE EDUCATION DEBATE

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The flipped classroom is not a recent phenomenon, its origins can be dated back to the Spring of 2007 when American High School teachers, Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams, began using screen capture software to record their science lectures. Once completed, Bergmann and Sams would post their lectures online for students to negotiate prior to entering their classrooms. However, their decision to extend their students learning beyond the confines of the traditional classroom was not driven by the development of new technology. It was, instead, driven by Bergmann and Sams deep frustrations regarding student attendance. In this instance, issue relating to poor attendance were due, in part, to the amount of time students spent out of class travelling to, and from, various school sports activities. As educators, we are well versed on the negatively impact recurring absence has on our student's education. However, Bergmann and Aaron simple chose to act in order to positively addressed the situation.¹

What can we learn from Bergmann and Sams flipped classroom, and how does it fit into fine art education?

Today, it is clear advancements in digital technology have been instrumental in re-configuring the educational landscape. Where blended learning and mobile learning, as educational methodologies, have changed the way courses are being delivered, how staff teach, and how students learn. With this development, greater flexibility has occurred; where being online had become a valuable site for learning and teaching, and being off-site has is the new locale.

However, one of the main benefit for students and institutions adopting blended learning methodologies resides in the fact that geographical distance is no longer a barrier to education as advancements in digital technology have subsequently allowed for space and time to, at once, expand and collapse. Greater flexibility has therefore occurred and, as a result, students are now able to physically locate themselves far beyond the walls of the institution and still attain a valuable education. However, within the context of fine art education, blended learning and mobile learning are still very much in their infancy and as a result, resides very much on the periphery of the fine art curriculum.² However, there is a simple explanation for this marginalized position - fine art education is an all-encompassing experience, one that relies heavily on the physical presence of all students. Therefore, full immersion is actively encouraged, and every corner of the art school campus is made accessible in order for students to experience a range of different sites of learning. By its very nature fine art education is therefore quite unique as it includes the following: the studio, technical facilities, lecture

¹ 2014 Brock International Prize in Education Nominee, p2, Article entitled, Our Story: Creating the Flipped Classroom, written by Jonathan Bergmann and Aaron Sams. <http://brockprize.org/nominees/Bergmann-Sams.pdf>

² Conference Paper entitled, Natives, Immigrants, Residents or Visitors? Developing a Student-led Understanding of the Role of Digital Literacies in the Curriculum, written by Victoria Boyd. Presented at The International Enhancement Themes Conference, Glasgow, 11th-13th June 2013.

theatres, seminar rooms, workshops, libraries, one- to-one tutorials, group tutorials, critiques, participation in off-site events, and a variety of student union supported initiatives. As a result, the scholastic nature of this educational provision is multifaceted, and is offered in order for students to fully situate themselves in their studies. All fine art students therefore need to be physically present, and within the institution, in order to fully connect with their chosen field of study. Therefore, attendance is crucial. However, the very specific of this form of creative education.

By its very nature Fine art education is reciprocal, outward looking and relies heavily on active participation between students and staff. Therefore, I will paraphrase Nicholas Bourriaud:

‘We see and we perceive, we comment, and we evolve in a unique space and time’.³

However, why are we, the institution, not utilizing the scope of the space and time we occupy? Is David White (Head of Technology Enhanced Learning at the University of the Arts London) correct in his 2011 hypothesis that we, as staff, are merely ‘visitors’ to this digitally enhanced landscape? It is quite clear that our fine art students today occupy this territory with great ease - their digital dexterity permeates every used and unused space in our art schools. Where their status as ‘residents’ is confirmed every minute of every single day. For those of us over the age of thirty, we may be perceived as ‘visitors’. However, if we re-purpose White’s technology driven ‘Visitors and Residents’ conceptual framework,⁴ and transpose it onto the art school model we, as educators, become the ‘residents’, and our students become the ‘visitors’. However, the idea behind this repositioning is not meant to undermine our students. Instead, it is simply use to highlight the wealth of knowledge we have acquired due to the nature and length of our academic tenure. What our occupation has afforded us is real insight in to shifts in student behavior. It is this understanding that is our strength. We must therefore utilize it when it comes to developing new opportunities for our fine art students, especially those with severe difficulties.

For some time now students arrive have been arriving at our educational institutions with a range of concerns. Some are easy to support. However, others are not. Depression is on the increase, and a growing number of our students suffer extreme forms of anxiety; with some conditions so severe that physically entering the institution is a daily challenge. It is therefore such observations that return me to the rationale behind the development of the flipped classroom, as concerns regarding poor attendance prompted change. However, given the specifics of fine art education, how can we best support students who experience extended periods of difficulty that result in prolonged absence?

Today, a number of our fine art students build their own web sites in order to post their work

³ Original quote, “I see and I perceive, I comment, and I evolve in a unique space and time.” p16 Relational Aesthetics, written by Nicholas Bourriaud, 1998.

⁴ David White and Alison Le Cornu, Visitors and Residents: A new typology for online. *First Monday*, Volume 16, Number 9 – 5 September 2011.

that also utilize a range of social sites such as; vimeo, facebook, flickr, instagram, youtube and twitter. In order to gain autonomy, Student's develop these outward facing socially orientated sites specifically as promotional platforms for their growing arts practices. They are rarely considered as learning and teaching tools for the institution. Of course, technology has been used within fine art education with lecture capture, and the virtual realms of Blackboard and Moodle being available to students and staff. However, there is a two dimensionality to these institutionally supported sites that can be limiting, and as a result, don't quite suit the situatedness of fine art education.

A proposition for an expanded studio should therefore focus on the development of a supportive multifaceted technologically driven site for learning - one suitable for the site-specific nature of fine art education, designed for a range of disadvantaged students that best support the distinctive aims and objectives of fine art education today.